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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000944

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: OPERATION RESTORE ORDER WREAKS HAVOC IN MUTARE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1
.4 b/d

Summary

1. (C) On June 23 and 24, poloff visited the city of Mutare in Zimbabwe,s Eastern Highlands to see the effects of Operation Restore Order. During the visit she met with the City,s MDC Mayor as well as local businessmen. The high-density suburb of Sakubva has been hard hit, and Mutare,s main market has been dismantled. As elsewhere, the GOZ is providing no relief for the displaced and allowing outside organizations to provide only limited emergency assistance. The mayor said he and his MDC-led City Council had few resources to assist their constituents. He said Mutare had been particularly hard hit by the operation. Many residents were third and fourth generation immigrants from neighboring countries who had no Zimbabwean rural home to return to. In addition, they were primarily agricultural workers who had already been displaced by the government,s land seizures. END SUMMARY.

Devastation with Limited Assistance

2. (SBU) On June 23, poloff observed that the large Green Market near the center of town was demolished, and piles of goods were still smoldering. Former traders who lingered around the demolished market said they had nowhere to go and no transport to get anywhere. They had not heard that they would be allowed to set up businesses elsewhere. A nearby vegetable market was thriving, however. One man told poloff that the police had left the market, which spilled over from the area of stalls into a nearby field, because people from the rural area came in to town to sell their produce there and the government did not want to discourage that.

3. (SBU) On trips through the main high-density suburb of Sakubva on June 23 and 24, poloff observed that, for each house still standing, approximately four or five structures had been demolished. Displaced people interviewed said they had torn down their own structures and moved their possessions when police demanded they did so. (N.B. The police have been charging substantial fines for tearing down homes and destroying property, thus encouraging people to destroy their own homes.) However, most people appeared to remain in the areas where their homes had been. Those interviewed said they had nowhere else to go. Some families had begun vegetable gardens on the foundations of destroyed homes. A family with a new-born baby was huddling in a make-shift shelter on the foundation of their former home, spending much of their time trying to keep the baby warm and finding food. (N.B., Mutare is at higher elevation than Harare, and temperatures were dipping to near freezing at night.) MDC mayor Kagurabadza told poloff that during the previous week two newborn babies had died from exposure.

4. (SBU) One woman, the owner of a former furniture factory in Sakubva, said the police had allowed her to move her equipment and materials to a house across the street, where work continued. She had been promised that she and other informal traders would be moved to a new location to continue their businesses. However, she did not know where or when the new area was projected to open. The furniture factory owner told Embassy staff of a sports field where some of the displaced were waiting to be transported back to their rural homes.

5. (SBU) On June 23, at the sports field camp, poloff observed a few families huddled near some tents, one of which bore the Red Cross symbol. Police officers there questioned Embassy staff on the purpose of the visit and wrote down identifying information. The officers said they had just finished setting up their station and were trying to conduct a census of the approximately 20 families in the camp. They said poloff had just missed the Zimbabwe Red Cross staff who had set up the tents. The GOZ was providing no support to the camp other than the police presence. On June 24, when

poloff returned, police said staff from Christian Care, which was planning to distribute food and bring additional tents, had just left the camp. One of the displaced approached the Embassy vehicle and asked if we were there to take them away. Police said that all the families were allowed to stay subject to agreeing to return to their rural homes but that no transport had yet been available.

MDC-led Council Neutralized

16. (C) On June 23, poloff met with Mutare Mayor Kagurabadza, who was then on annual leave but was spending his vacation gathering emergency supplies and distributing them in Sakubva. He would only agree to meet outside of his office and would not tell poloff the location of the meeting until the last second due to fears that civil servants in his office would report the meeting to the CIO. Kagurabadza said the MDC-dominated City Council, which had long faced obstruction from the GOZ, had not been advised when the operation began in Mutare. He and the Council had had discussions with the police and the provincial governor after he operation began in Harare. They had agreed to leave some shacks for people as a temporary solution until the Council could make alternative arrangements. However, the police and the governor had not honored the agreement.

17. (C) Kagurabadza said there had been unconfirmed reports that even approved structures were torn down. There was one confirmed report of three houses destroyed by police despite the occupants having had their City Council-approved plans in hand when the police arrived. The City council was trying to minimize the effects of the operation on the displaced but had no resources to do so and faced interference from the GOZ on this and other issues. For example, the Ministry of Local Government had announced that the Council would no longer be authorized to sell new housing stands.

18. (C) Kagurabadza said Restore Order was having a particularly disastrous effect on his constituents, because many were third or fourth generation descendants of immigrants, particularly from nearby Mozambique, and they had no rural home to go to. He said that when the land invasions began, many former farmworkers from the timber estates were displaced and had settled in Sakubva. It was difficult psychologically for these people to be displaced yet again. He estimated about 30,000 families, 40% of Mutare's population, had been displaced during Restore Order.

Effects on Local Industry Mixed

19. (SBU) On June 23, poloff met with Bill Johnstone of the Timber Producers Federation. Johnstone said that, with the exception of door manufacturer Border Timbers, the Federation's members had not been much affected by Restore Order, due to the fact that most employees lived on the timber estates. On June 24, James Goneso of the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers, Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) also said that most GAPWUZ members lived on the plantations, but there were fears that Restore Order would enter the plantations and take down structures in workers, compounds. Some workers had already been displaced because they had been living across the road from the plantations in areas that were destroyed during the Operation. Goneso said some employees had already begun leaving for rural areas. Those who were the descendants of immigrants had nowhere to go, and many were hiding in the mountains or squatting in new areas. On June 24, Josephat Rushinga of the Coffee Grower,s Association told poloff that many coffee plantation employees had been displaced from their homes in town or areas of roadside shacks near the plantations. He said most employees were back to work but had needed several days to organize their affairs after their homes had been destroyed.

Comment

10. (C) Mutare has been among the areas hardest hit by Operation Restore Order and was one of the first parts of the country to see wide-scale destruction. Two factors likely account for this: first, the city and its environs have been strongly supportive of the MDC and some of the worst fraud in the March parliamentary elections occurred in Manicaland. Second, the province is home to some of Zimbabwe,s richest agricultural land and largest commercial farms. The labor shortage on these farms has been acute and the GOZ knew just where to look for agricultural workers) Sakubva) which was largely populated by former agricultural workers who had fled poor pay and abusive conditions and settled in the slum. In fact, the first reports of people being forcibly sent to rural areas came out of Mutare. That said, Restore Order is no more likely in the long run to stem the inevitable tide of

urbanization in Mutare than it is anywhere else in Zimbabwe.
SCHULTZ